



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

Storytelling and ideas for everyone, everywhere.

**Strategic Plan
2024 - 2028**

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Aurelia St Clair during the live recording of the Being Biracial podcast. Photo: The Round

Introduction

There is nothing quite like The Wheeler Centre anywhere else in Australia. As we approach our 15th year, the Centre has established itself as the home of storytelling, delivering year-round events with leading writers and thinkers from around Australia and the world.

Our success has grown through our audience's deep love of reading and public discussion – a desire to know more, to be challenged and to come together through conversation. As The Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas, we consistently program inspiring and entertaining events. We are also proudly a place where the state's most respected literary organisations are housed, work together and thrive. We are based in the heart of Melbourne, yet our community and impact extend well beyond the CBD.

Storytelling and ideas for everyone, everywhere is an ambitious and expansive plan that aims to open pathways to reading, writing and debate to the broadest possible audience. We want to continually grow the number of people experiencing and engaging with The Wheeler Centre.

We know there is appetite for what we do around the country and over the next four years we plan to meet that demand by taking more conversations to more communities – particularly the suburbs and regions throughout Victoria.

In addition, we will be expanding The Wheeler Centre's digital presence so audiences from all over the world can engage with more of our work, catch up on our events and listen to our podcasts.

Our vision is to be a globally renowned home for storytelling and ideas that is sought after and celebrated by writers, readers, speakers, listeners and decision-makers.

Our mission is to connect, support and promote Victoria's unique culture of writing, stories and ideas. We seek to open up writing, reading, storytelling and inclusive public discussion to everyone, everywhere and in doing this, we also elevate Melbourne's status as Australia's original UNESCO City of Literature.

We can't wait to deliver this next chapter of The Wheeler Centre's story.



Kate Torney OAM
Chair



Erin Vincent
Chief Executive Officer

Our Context

The Wheeler Centre emerged in 2009 as a representative body for Melbourne’s rich, complex and long-established relationship with storytelling. This was sparked by the city’s designation as a UNESCO City of Literature in 2008; the first in Australia, the second in the world.

From its physical standpoint on the ancestral and custodial lands of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people of the Kulin Nations, in the heart of Melbourne’s CBD, The Wheeler Centre honours more than 40,000 years of storytelling in Naarm and Victoria. We take our cue from the breadth, depth and vibrancy of literary cultures, communities and individuals that continue to be in dialogue here today.

Situated alongside Australia’s oldest public library, the State Library of Victoria, The Wheeler Centre has always been well-placed to foster the state’s love of reading, with more people reading for pleasure than anywhere else in Australia. But The Wheeler Centre is so much more than this. It welcomes, connects and offers a multidisciplinary space for mutual understanding. Not just for lovers of the written and spoken word, but for voices and authors of all forms, ages, platforms and languages, who express themselves in and across a multitude of contexts – from festivals and large-scale organisations to grassroots collectives, libraries, learning spaces and publications.

Since its inception as a meeting point for books, writing and ideas, The Wheeler Centre has grown into its role as a responsive custodian of Melbourne’s literary ecosystem and a portal to global creative conversations. We make room for all voices in this diverse and changing landscape and we encourage words to drive increased understanding between peoples.

The Wheeler Centre has fostered its focus on local and regional literary culture through its programs of support to resident organisations and writers, its strategic and complementary programming and its digital content. Additionally, The Wheeler Centre is home to local and global literary organisations including Blak & Bright, Melbourne Writers Festival, the UNESCO City of Literature Melbourne Office and PEN Melbourne. We partner and work closely with these organisations on issues of national and international literary relevance and host conversations that can be difficult but are critical to the health of our sector and our society.

The unique mandate of The Wheeler Centre is supported by the Victorian Government and a generous endowment from Maureen and Tony Wheeler AO, founders of Lonely Planet publications. State government funding supports our core operations and the Wheeler endowment enables the Centre to deliver limited year-round high-quality programming on issues of special or particular relevance. However, as a non-profit organisation, we rely on the ongoing support of our partners, sponsors and donors to enhance the Centre’s focus and grow and generate meaningful opportunities.



Emma Donovan performs at Spring Fling Opening Night. Photo: T.J Garvie



Audience members after the live recording of the Being Biracial podcast. Photo: The Round

Our Purpose

We exist to honour and amplify the culture of ideas, stories and debate that has existed in Victoria for millennia.

We serve writers, storytellers, thinkers, readers, listeners – the diverse ecology of people, communities and cultures that keep ideas alive and evolving.

We do this through:

- 1.** Facilitating conversations, constructive debate and community-building connections throughout the year - across a variety of formats, platforms and audiences - to promote and complement our state's literary ecology.
- 2.** Partnering and resourcing local and regional literary organisations, festivals and collectives, with collaboration, support, inclusivity and access to our physical and digital hub.
- 3.** Enabling the growth of the literary community by supporting writers at all stages of their careers and advocating for the sustainability and diversity of the sector.
- 4.** Honouring the cultural heritage and influence of words here and the unique literary identity that arises from and connects our landscape.
- 5.** Improving the accessibility and longevity of our work by creating and publishing digital content and maintaining a digital event archive.



Our Vision

Is to be a globally renowned home for storytelling and ideas that is sought after and celebrated by writers, readers, speakers, listeners and decision-makers.

Thomas Mayo delivers his address at Spring Fling, October 2023.
Photo: T.J. Garvie

Our Mission

To connect, support and promote Victoria's unique culture of writing, storytelling and ideas.

We seek to open up writing, reading, storytelling and inclusive public discussion to everyone, everywhere and in doing this, we also elevate Melbourne's status as Australia's original UNESCO City of Literature.



Melissa Lucashenko in conversation with host Evelyn Araluen at Spring Fling 2023. Photo: Ernesto Arriagada

Our Point of Difference

The Wheeler Centre is a hub for Victoria’s key literary organisations. Our physical building in Little Lonsdale Street Melbourne is home to the First Peoples’ Blak & Bright festival, Melbourne Writers Festival, Emerging Writers’ Festival, the Melbourne City of Literature Office, PEN Melbourne, Writers Victoria, Australian Poetry, Express Media and Freeplay.

These diverse and pivotal literary organisations each have their own specific purpose, enhanced by shared spaces, thinking, programming and advocacy. Together, our Wheeler Centre hub enables a free flow of ideas, embedded collaboration and extraordinary opportunities for writers, readers, listeners, thinkers and audiences.

We provide professional and creative development; we program year-round to strengthen and add value to festivals and one-off events; we ensure that our events are accessible and affordable; and we act nimbly to program meaningful discussions in response to global events and debate and to strengthen the public’s understanding of issues.

The Wheeler Centre’s success has grown from Melbourne’s love of storytelling and debate which earned the city its designation as Australia’s first UNESCO City of Literature. This means we participate in a unique global network of creative cities, notably the other Cities of Literature. The Melbourne City of Literature Office provides significant opportunities for Victorian writers, libraries, festivals and independent publishers.

We are proudly based in Melbourne, but our impact goes beyond the city. We maintain a regular presence in regional Victoria, work with authors and thinkers nationally and internationally and our digital audiences engage from around the world.



A fan meets playwright S Shakthidharan during our Cultural Catalysts event. Photo: Brett Walker



An audience member asking questions during our International Women's Day Power of Politics event.
Photo: Ernesto Arriagada



Audience members listen to Katy Hessel at the NGV. Photo: Tobias Titz



Delivering Our Goals and Strategic Priorities 2024-2028

1.

Realising The Wheeler Centre as a leading physical and digital hub for writers, readers, storytellers and listeners.

We are doing this by:

- 1.1** Delivering impactful, year-round digital and in-person programming that enhances the state's literary reputation and activity.
- 1.2** Developing and delivering a digital strategy for The Wheeler Centre.
- 1.3** Developing a business case for capital improvements to The Wheeler Centre building to address access, optimise experience and enhance efficiency.
- 1.4** Scoping and delivering minor upgrade works to The Wheeler Centre's foyer area to enhance visitor and hirer experience.

Rebecca Kuang speaking at her event to promote her latest book *Yellowface*. Photo: T.J Garvie





2.

Facilitating thought-leading conversations and constructive debates that reflect, inspire and build community.

We are doing this by:

- 2.1** Foregrounding First Peoples writers, speakers and audiences in The Wheeler Centre's program.
- 2.2** Designing and delivering reflective programming so that new and diverse audiences see themselves.
- 2.3** Delivering multilingual programming annually as opportunities arise in partnership with relevant organisations.

Beverley Wang hosting the Rebecca Kuang *Yellowface* event.
Photo: T.J Garvie

3.

Initiating new partnerships to diversify the Centre's profile and audience base.

We are doing this by:

- 3.1** Expanding The Wheeler Centre's network of regional and outer-suburban partner organisations, funders and venues.
- 3.2** Formalising partnerships with key entities across the university, media and creative industries sectors to support event and program diversification.
- 3.3** Establishing avenues for diverse young people to guide The Wheeler Centre in its services and programming, with a view to redesigning The Wheeler Centre's children and young peoples' programming to meet gaps and opportunities.
- 3.4** Fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Audience members at the 2024 VPLA's. Photo: T.J. Garvie





4.

Building our professional and creative development programs to secure ongoing investment and provide meaningful opportunities to writers and creators.

We are doing this by:

- 4.1** Securing ongoing partners to support the delivery of key Professional and Creative Development programs.
- 4.2** Prioritising financial support for writers, judges, mentors and other creatives involved in The Wheeler Centre's development programs.
- 4.3** Ensuring The Wheeler Centre development programs offer meaningful industry connections and pathways to publication.
- 4.4** Promoting the impact of our development programs and the established writers whose careers they have supported.

Evelyn Araluen speaks during Writing Blak Legacies: A First Nations Literature Gala. Photo: T.J Garvie

5.

Ensuring the role and functions of The Wheeler Centre are transparent and accessible and removing barriers to entry.

We are doing this by:

- 5.1** Reviewing our branding strategy to address logo, taglines, voice and tone of The Wheeler Centre.
- 5.2** Maintaining The Wheeler Centre's commitment to low cost and free programming.
- 5.3** Continually finding ways to reach audiences where they are and build our capacity to adapt nimbly to audience movement.
- 5.4** Growing The Wheeler Centre's membership base.

Bonnie Garmus discussing her new book *Lessons in Chemistry*.
Photo: Phoebe Powell





6.

Partnering with the Centre's resident organisations through structured collaboration, allyship and support.

We are doing this by:

- 6.1** Strengthening relationships between The Wheeler Centre and resident organisations.
- 6.2** Partnering on programming opportunities.

Hasib Hourani and Jess Zaroni presenting at the Emerging Writers' Festival Program Launch. Photo: Kyle Archie Knight

7.

Building our financial sustainability by cultivating new income streams and meaningful collaborations with donors, sponsors and partners.

We are doing this by:

- 7.1** Developing a Donor Strategy for The Wheeler Centre.
- 7.2** Securing new donors and sponsors to add to our existing donor pool.
- 7.3** Developing corporate packages for The Wheeler Centre including hiring, catering and speakers/programming.
- 7.4** Reviewing The Wheeler Centre's venue hire rates, marketing approaches and general offer.

Katy Hessel discusses her new book *The Story of Art Without Men*.
Photo: Tobias Titz





8.

Participating in national strategy, advocacy and new initiatives relating to writing, storytelling and sector sustainability, in partnership with resident organisations and sector stakeholders.

We are doing this by:

- 8.1** Engaging with the development, design and operations of the proposed Writing Australia Board of Creative Australia.
- 8.2** Participating in the development of the Victorian government’s Creative State 2029 strategy.
- 8.3** Developing joint/collective responses to challenges and opportunities in facing resident organisations.

Audience members at the Rebecca Kuang: Yellowface event.
Photo: T.J Garvie

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The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

The Wheeler Centre acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Centre stands. We acknowledge and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their Elders, past and present, as the custodians of the world's oldest continuous living culture.